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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 MEXICO 004238

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SUBJECT: AMLO URGES SUPPORTERS "TO SAVE DEMOCRACY"

REF: A. A) MEXICO 3953
1B. B) MEXICO 3832

11. (SBU) Summary: At his third mass "informational meeting," Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador (AMLO, presidential candidate of the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD), called on his supporters to begin a continuous vigil until the electoral tribunal (TEPJF) issues its final decision with respect to the presidential election results. Speaking before a crowd varyingly estimated at between 180,000 and 2 million participants, AMLO called upon his supporters to set up "camps" on Mexico City's central plaza and on major thoroughfares. Within hours and in what was clearly a well-organized effort, large tents were erected along several major thoroughfares, causing havoc to Mexico City's already complicated traffic. In considerably broadening his campaign of civil disobedience in a manner that will directly impact the lives of millions of Mexico City residents, AMLO is pursuing a high risk strategy that ensures his cause will not be ignored -- and that risks alienating many erstwhile supporters. End summary.

The Two Million Man March Falls Short

12. (SBU) On July 30, AMLO led thousands of supporters, many bused in from out-of-town, in a march along Mexico's principal thoroughfare to the Zocalo or central square, where he addressed the assembled masses. The march and rally was the third in the series of "informational meetings" he has held since the July 2 election (ref A). Estimates of the crowd size varied widely and as usual were highly politicized. While the Federal Preventative Police (PFP) estimated the crowd at 180,000, the PRD-led Mexico City government estimated it at two million, neatly matching the goal the party had set in advance of the event. Daily newspaper Reforma claimed to have conducted a careful study of the size of the crowd, based upon an enlarged, aerial photo, and estimated it at 348,000. A poloff who attended both yesterday's rally and the first one (ref B) noted that although yesterday's rally appeared somewhat larger than the first one -- at which the crowd was estimated at between 150,000 and 280,000 -- it was not dramatically larger, suggesting that the Reforma estimate may be closer to the mark than either of the two conflicting official estimates.

13. (U) Speaking to his assembled supporters, AMLO announced that the challenge they faced was one of saving Mexican democracy. He noted that in a country as unequal as Mexico, democracy provided millions of poor their only hope of improving their lives, and that once democratic means of protest are restricted, the only remaining alternatives are submission or violence. He contended that the TEPJF

magistrates were being subject to strong pressures from those who consider themselves "Mexico's masters and lords." He added "it's not that we do not respect institutions, it's that in our country, unfortunately, we do not have a tradition that assures us that the men managing the institutions act with rectitude and decency." Further emphasizing his distrust of institutions, he added that while many invoke the "rule of law," in Mexico, those responsible for administering justice have used the rule of law to "legalize...the abuses that the strong commit," rather than to protect the weak. He said that while he hoped the TEPJF magistrates would act "responsibly," he would not sit idly "with his arms crossed."

Camping in the Streets

¶ 4. (U) AMLO then proposed that he and his followers stay "in a Permanent Assembly" until the Tribunal pronounced its decision. He proposed that his followers set up 31 "camps" on the Zocalo, one for each Mexican state, and that sixteen additional camps -- one for each Mexico City ward -- be set up along several major thoroughfares, including Paseo de la Reforma. He insisted that the camps maintain "discipline, respect and cleanliness," urging his supporters to protect gardens and historic monuments in the area. He also announced that artistic and cultural events will be held at each of the camps. He said that he himself would live in the camps until the TEPJF reached its decision, and indeed was reported to have spent the night in a tent on the Zocalo. He concluded his remarks by noting that he would announce further planned acts of civil disobedience in the future. There were no reports of violence during the rally.

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¶ 5. (SBU) During the evening hours, large tarpaulin tents were erected over segments of Paseo de la Reforma, in what was clearly a well-organized -- and possibly well-funded -- effort. Some supporters erected smaller, more private tents on the blockaded streets. Although the encampments wreaked havoc on the Monday morning rush hour, the authorities in the PRD-controlled Mexico City municipal government announced that the blockages did not violate the law and that they would not intervene unless the protesters actually committed a crime.

A 21st Century Caudillo

¶ 6. (SBU) In a discussion with poloff, political analyst Rosanna Fuentes-Berain noted that in turning to civil resistance to pressure the electoral authorities, AMLO has fallen back on the strategy that has worked best for him in the past. She noted that his tactics fell squarely within Mexico's long tradition of political strongmen (caudillos) manipulating the masses and commented on the irony in his demands for transparency and accountability, two qualities for which, she said, his administration of Mexico City had not been known. She feared, however, that AMLO's intransigence left no room for compromise, and criticized Felipe Calderon as well for not showing flexibility. She argued that in resolving the current standoff, a rigid adherence to the rule of law would backfire and that the TEPJF magistrates needed to show political sensitivity to avoid exacerbating tensions.

Comment: AMLO Ups the Ante

¶ 7. (SBU) Comment: In going beyond mass rallies and actually blocking major Mexico City thoroughfares -- perhaps for an extended period -- AMLO has upped the ante considerably. While until now most Mexicans followed AMLO's rallies and the occasional small-scale act of civil disobedience on the television news, his current tactics will have a direct

impact on the lives of millions living in the Mexico City metropolitan area. In pursuing this high-stakes strategy, he risks alienating many people who voted for him, but who resent the inconvenience created by these blockages. Moreover, while until now he appears to have been operating with considerable support from the PRD-led municipal government, the municipal government undoubtedly will find itself under increasing pressure both from angry commuters and from business owners whose enterprises are being hurt by the disruption. It remains to be seen whether over time, the political price of AMLO's tactics will prove too high to sustain. End comment

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